

# ABOVEGROUND & UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANKS

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## A FACT SHEET

Home Heating Oil Tank: Definition - A home heating oil tank (aboveground or underground) stores heating oil for consumption on the premises where stored.

### Responsibilities of a Tank Owner/Operator:

Look at your tank system. A monthly check is recommended as a preventive maintenance tool. Report sudden changes in product level or problems to a heating repair professional or your oil supplier.

Understand your tank system and how it works. You should know the tank size, age, construction material (of both tank and piping) and who to call if a repair is needed. Keep track of all deliveries.

If obvious signs of contamination are found (such as petroleum vapors, oil on property, etc.), immediately report petroleum releases or discharges to any DEQ Regional Offices listed on the [Contacts](#) page of the Virginia DEQ Petroleum Program web site.

### Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

Office of Spill Response and Remediation General Home Heating Oil Tank Information:

- 1)** Any unexplained presence of water in the tank may signify a leak. There is a water-finding paste available to check for water in your tank. Some aboveground tanks have a small oil/water separator installed (a small bowl-like fixture at the bottom of the tank) to drain water from the tank. A small amount of water is often in a tank (condensation), but a sudden increase should be reported to your oil supplier. If water needs to be pumped out of a tank, be sure that the contents are properly collected, contained, and disposed of, not pumped onto the ground.
- 2)** Operating problems with a furnace may also signify a leak. Have a heating repair professional inspect your heating system on a regular basis. Sudden changes in oil consumption or the furnace shutting off may indicate a leak or other problem.
- 3)** Do not wait for your tank to leak to inspect, protect, or replace it. Since you cannot see the condition of underground tanks, you are usually not aware of developing problems. Underground tanks are especially susceptible to problems because of their corrosive environment. The rate of corrosion varies due to a number of site conditions and type of tank construction.
- 4)** Tanks and lines installed aboveground allow the owner to be able to see problems quickly while they are still "small". Underground tanks and piping require more diligent professional attention.

**5)** Usually, the small 275 gallon aboveground tanks should be placed inside or in a sheltered area. These tanks were often specifically designed to be used inside (shaped to be able to fit through doorways) and the steel construction was not intended for outside use. They corrode at an accelerated rate and may topple over due to severe weather conditions.

**6)** Aboveground tanks should be placed horizontally (with sturdy supports) on a concrete pad. You can also surround the pad with a row of mortared cinder blocks so that if any oil leaks from your tank, it will be temporarily contained for an easier cleanup.

**7)** Tank piping is a common source of contamination (freezing/thawing can cause the pipes to split open). Piping can be encased so that if a leak occurs it is contained inside another pipe.

**8)** Proper installation and maintenance of the tank system is the key to protecting your property from oil contamination. Use professional tank installers and/or repair technicians to work on your tank system.

**9)** Although removal of unused home heating oil tanks may not be required by law, DEQ recommends that unused underground home heating oil tanks (both tank and piping) be removed from the ground and disposed of properly. If this is not possible, the tank should be emptied, cleaned, and then filled with inert material (sand, cement slurry) to prevent future problems (collapse). Fill pipes should be sealed or removed. Tank closure work should be conducted by a professional. Check local codes and ordinances. Report any signs of contamination/leakage to DEQ.

**10)** DEQ has a reimbursement fund, called the Virginia Petroleum Storage Tank Fund (VPSTF), from which a homeowner may be able to recover some of the costs of cleanups associated with leaking tanks. VPSTF does not reimburse tank removal, repair or replacement costs, only eligible cleanup costs. The financial responsibility requirement for home heating oil tanks is \$500 per occurrence. The actual amount reimbursed depends on following DEQ's directions and pre-approval for conducting the cleanup and whether the costs you incur are within the usual, customary rates reimbursed by DEQ. Copies of applicable homeowner insurance documents must be provided to DEQ and may affect access to VPSTF.

**In Summary:**

There are approximately 400,000 aboveground and underground home heating oil tanks in Virginia. Commonly, homeowners and home purchasers ask what must be done with an old oil tank. Although the old tank can be kept for some future purpose, DEQ strongly recommends that you at least empty the tank. Better still, an owner who wishes to preclude any problems or future liabilities associated with the tank may choose to formally "demolish" the tank structure under the Uniform Statewide Building Code. This involves obtaining a building permit from the local code official, and proceeding to close the tank in place or removing it from the ground. In-place closure involves emptying the tank and filling it with an inert solid material like sand, gravel, or cement slurry. Removal involves emptying the tank, mitigating any fire hazards, and safely pulling the tank for recycling or disposal.